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SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/PASCUAL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/18/2018
TAGS: [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ARIEL MAYOR: SETTLEMENT POPULATION "STEADY BUT
STRUGGLING"

Classified By: Acting Principal Officer Greg Marchese, per reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ariel Mayor Ron Nachman told Poloff September 17 that his secular settlement is "struggling" to grow and has not received construction approvals. He said he will sue the GOI if it includes Ariel in permanent status negotiations. Unlike other Nablus area settlers, Ariel's population is not ideological or known for using violence to exert political pressure on the GOI, according to Nachman.
END SUMMARY.

Ariel's 18,000 "Steady, But Struggling"

¶2. (SBU) Ron Nachman, the Mayor of Ariel, a settlement that extends 22 km inside the West Bank, told Poloff September 17 that the settlement has 18,000 settlers and is "steady but struggling." Nachman and his chief of staff, Dina Schalit, said half the settlers in Ariel immigrated from Russia in the early 1990's, but noted that three new Amcit families arrived recently. Nachman said some sixty-five percent of Ariel's population commutes to work in Tel Aviv and acknowledged that Ariel has an aging population. He recently signed a sister-city agreement with Mobile, Alabama. (Note: The agreement refers to "Ariel, Israel." End Note)

¶3. (SBU) Nachman complained that, while Ariel has plans for a 450-unit housing project, it does not have the necessary MOD approvals; he may sue the GOI for preventing this construction. He said investors have already purchased units and now cannot build. Earlier this year, he received approval (by phone call from PM Olmert) for 48 new units.

Political Future

¶4. (C) Nachman said Ariel is not an issue in permanent status negotiations; he would sue the GOI if there is any discussion of Ariel in that context. He noted that he envisions a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which Gaza goes to Egypt, West Bank cities are ceded to Jordan, and equal populations of settlers and Arab Israelis are transferred.

¶5. (C) Nachman dismissed recent violence by settlers toward neighboring Palestinian villages as the result of media bias, and said "If a dog bites a man no one notices, but when a man bites a dog it's news." (Comment: There is no history of violence by Ariel settlers against Palestinians and none of its leadership have advocated violence as a tool to impact GOI policies towards settlements. End Comment.)

Ariel University and Sports Complex

¶6. (C) Poloff visited Ariel's recently built, USD 35

million sports and recreation complex (named after San Antonio evangelical minister John Hagee). Nachman said Hagee provided USD 3 million and other Amcit donors the rest. Poloff saw an olympic-size pool, hot tubs, and an exercise room with some 100 machines. Ariel also has a "University Center" with over 10,000 students. According to Nachman, some 90 percent are from Green Line Israel, and 400 are Arab Israelis.

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